Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Frequently Asked Questions

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Why is the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery such a hot topic?

- The red snapper stock had been overfished and undergoing overfishing since the late 1980s.
- Results of a recently completed red snapper update assessment indicate that although the red snapper stock is still overfished, it is no longer undergoing overfishing and the total allowable catch (TAC) can be increased.
- All fisheries that harvest red snapper as catch and/or bycatch contribute to total fishing mortality, including the commercial red snapper fishery, recreational red snapper fishery, and shrimp fishery.
  - Red snapper bycatch in the brown shrimp fishery, and red snapper catch and bycatch in the commercial red snapper fishery are the primary sources of red snapper mortality in the western Gulf of Mexico.
  - Red snapper catch and bycatch in the recreational red snapper fishery is the primary source of red snapper mortality in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

What will the proposed regulatory amendment do?

- This regulatory amendment proposes to increase red snapper TAC from 5.0 million pounds (MP) to 7.185 MP, consistent with goals and objectives of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) red snapper rebuilding plan. −Commercial quota (51 percent): 3.66 MP −Recreational quota (49 percent): 3.525 MP

How would the proposed regulatory amendment affect the recreational red snapper season in 2010?

- The projected recreational fishing season would range between 51 and 60 days.
- The season is tentatively defined as June 1 through July 18 based on preliminary data; however, the closure date may be adjusted in the final rule implementing the regulatory amendment.
- The projected recreational fishing season (is shorter than the 75-day season recorded in 2010), in part, because of an continually increasing size of fish being harvested

How does the regulatory amendment affect the commercial red snapper fishery?

- Because the commercial sector is managed under an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program, and has maintained landings within their quota in recent years, the increase in TAC will be reflected in the allocation of pounds of red snapper for the fishing year.

What is a rebuilding plan?

- A rebuilding plan is a strategy used to manage harvest over a specified time period so that an "overfished" stock can increase in size to a legally mandated target level.

How and when was the current red snapper rebuilding plan implemented?

- The Council established the current red snapper rebuilding plan through Amendment 22 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP).
  - NOAA Fisheries Service implemented Amendment 22 in 2005.
  - Harvest rates in the rebuilding plan were modified in joint Amendment 27 to the Reef Fish FMP/Amendment 14 to the Shrimp FMP (implemented in early 2008).

What does the current red snapper rebuilding plan require?

- The current rebuilding plan requires fishery managers end overfishing of red snapper between 2009 and 2010, and rebuild the population to sustainable levels by 2032. The rebuilding plan provides commercial and recreational red snapper fisheries a combined annual TAC set initially at 5 MP.
- Shrimp effort, and the associated bycatch mortality of juvenile red snapper, is controlled, as needed, through time-area closures to ensure shrimp trawl bycatch mortality of red snapper is reduced 74 percent below the 2001-2003 time period. This reduction can be modified in the future as the Gulf red snapper stock rebuilds.
- The rebuilding plan also obligates the Council to periodically evaluate harvest and bycatch rates of red snapper relative to those allowed by the plan and to make adjustments, as needed, to ensure the population recovers on schedule. The TAC may be increased if the assessments determine the stock is rebuilding.

How are the red snapper and shrimp fisheries currently managed?

- Recreational red snapper fishery: −49 percent of TAC −Minimum size limit of 16 inches total length (TL) −Daily bag limit of two fish with a zero bag limit for the captain and crew of for-hire vessels −Seasonal closure (federal waters open June 1 to September 30, but note the closure date can differ from year to year)
- Commercial red snapper fishery: −51 percent of TAC −Minimum size limit of 13 inches TL −IFQ program, which allocates the commercial quota among individual fishers and corporations (see link at end of this document)

- Commercial shrimp fishery −Bycatch reduction device requirement to reduce juvenile red snapper bycatch −Seasonal-area closure if necessary to achieve target bycatch reduction −Ten-year permit moratorium to stabilize effort

Why is it necessary to reduce the red snapper catch and bycatch rates of these fisheries?

- The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires fishery managers end overfishing, and achieve, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield (OY) from federally managed fish stocks.
- OY is the amount of fish that provides the greatest overall benefit to the nation, particularly with respect to providing food production and recreational opportunities, and protecting marine ecosystems.

What is the status of current action?

- The Council submitted the regulatory amendment to NOAA Fisheries Service on January 14, 2011, for review by the Secretary of Commerce.
- The proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* on February 22, 2011, and was subject to a 30-day public comment period ending on March 24, 2011.

Links to additional information on red snapper management and rulemaking

- Red snapper assessment process and reports (http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar_Workshops.jsp?WorkshopNum=07)
- Regulations implemented in 2008 through Amendment 27/14 for Gulf of Mexico red snapper and shrimp fisheries (http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/RedSnapper/Amendment_27_14.htm)
- Commercial red snapper IFQ program (https://ifq.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/ifqrs/index.cfm)
- Red snapper recreational quota closure (http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/pdfs/GulfRedSnapperQuotaClosure4-19-11.pdf)